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Many classroom teachers are not teaching children to read at proper levels because they lack skill administering diagnostic tests and need practice interpreting children's reading behavior during testing. The text-lecture approach may be adequate for imparting information about diagnostic procedures, but it is not adequate for developing skill in the application of this information. Audio and video tapes, transparencies, and films can be used to simulate actual classroom behavior. Audio tapes develop skills of auditory perception and memory, while video tapes and films develop skills in the observation and interpretation of behavior. Simulation materials which require teacher response can substitute for children in the early part of a training program. Later the teachers assume responsibility for the analysis of reading behavior while working with children under the supervision of the college instructor. Such training facilitates the use of the new skills in the classroom. (Author/KJ)

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TEACHING DIAGNOSTIC TECHNIQUES TO CLASSROOM TEACHERS

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The Problem

It is not a pleasant thought but teachers are not matching children's instructional needs with correct programs and materials nor are they teaching children at proper levels.

As Johnson and Kress (1) point out, "...children are often considered ready for instruction when they have a great many deficiencies in their operating patterns at a particular level." This happens even when the teacher can recite the criteria for independent, instructional, and frustration levels in reading. These teachers do not recognize an instructional reading level performance when they are working with children. Why the gap between information and practice?

This situation has two parts. (1) The teachers lack skill in the administration of diagnostic tests, and (2) they need practice in the interpretation of the child's reading behavior when tested.

Classroom teachers can learn about diagnostic procedures through reading texts and test manuals and listening to lectures. Unfortunately learning about diagnostic procedures does not result in the teacher's using diagnostic procedures; she lacks the necessary skills. She especially lacks skill in individually administered tests. Something more is needed. Something must

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convert knowledge into classroom action. Teachers must apply what they know!

What teacher training devices will develop skill in applying this knowledge? What teacher skills are crucial? Detailed clinical techniques are not feasible because the classroom teacher has limited time available for working with individual children.

Classroom teachers can observe expressions of interest and behavior patterns which might influence learning to read. Teachers can talk with the children about their interests and attitudes toward reading. They can talk with the child's parents and with former teachers of the child. Some teachers may administer standardized diagnostic reading tests. But the shortcomings of group diagnostic reading tests are well known and most individually administered tests require too much time for administration. Teachers can learn to use the informal reading inventory. The teacher skills required to properly administer an informal reading inventory are as follows:

The memorization of a marking code;

Well developed skills of auditory discrimination and auditory memory;

Skill in recognizing the visual cues of stress which a child may exhibit during reading.

Tapes, transparencies, films, and video tapes can be used to develop these skills by simulating actual classroom behavior.

Developing Teacher Skills

Initially oral reading can be used to evaluate performance. The child is asked to read a short unfamiliar selection. The teacher can make a precise record of the child's reading performance by using a code and a second copy of the reading selection. She will insert symbols to record errors (2). This code enables the teacher to analyze a reading performance long after the testing; it even enables the teacher to read the selection the way the child did. This helps a teacher to recognize and understand error patterns; i.e., on this selection Jimmy consistently had trouble unlocking words where the "final e" rule should have been of help. These records are used to form general instructional groups or specific reading skill groups -- medial vowel sounds in one syllable words that end with "e".

The teachers memorize a marking code to make consistent analysis possible. Learning a marking code is the first step in developing skill in the use of informal diagnostic techniques. Learning the code forces the teacher to think about specific reading errors. She develops an awareness of the predominant error patterns by her analysis of the performance by the reader.

Providing Practice in Using the Code

Developing skill in the use of the code does not end with memorizing that code. Many teachers remember the symbols of a code but cannot produce an accurate record of a child's reading perfor-

mance because they cannot use the code fast enough. They need practice in its use.

Listening Skills

Teachers must also possess adequate listening skills of auditory discrimination and auditory memory to use the code correctly. The need for precise auditory discrimination is obvious when the child is making subtle errors in the use of phonics. Efficicient auditory memory is necessary because some children read rapidly even though they are making numerous word recognition errors. Experienced teachers can continue to make a record of the child's reading performance for over half a minute after the child has stopped reading aloud. A carefully designed series of audio tapes can provide the simulation of a child's oral reading performance at several grade levels. The teacher listens to the tape and uses the code to record the performance.

The teacher's accuracy with the code can be studied, errors noted and examined, and corrections made through replay of the tape. Visual transparencies of the reading selection, correctly coded, offer the teacher a visual example of the desired end product. These transparencies are especially valuable in training listening skills with a group of teachers.

Two or more teachers interested in developing these listening skills can employ simulation in another form. At least four copies of a test selection are needed. Each teacher simulates a child's

oral reading by marking one copy using the code symbols. Then she reads her script orally while other teachers use the code to record the performance. Repeated trading of these responsibilities, writing a script, listening and making a record, develop skills of auditory discrimination and auditory memory.

This procedure results in a second important benefit. Teachers develop an appreciation of what constitutes an "instructional level" oral reading performance. When teachers first try this activity, they randomly scatter so many errors throughout the selection that the performance is obviously at frustration level. There is no reason for the errors; practically every error that can be scored is present. While some children working at frustration level will show this random error pattern, many do not; their error patterns are consistent and clearly identifiable. As teachers continue using the code to produce an instructional level performance that can be analyzed and used to design an instructional program, they develop an appreciation for the child behavior they should expect i. classroom instructional groups (3). They develop an understanding of the performance criteria which define instructional level. Many teachers are surprised at how few word recognition errors are allowed at instructional level. Many teachers have reported reorganizing their classroom instructional groupings because they developed new insights through use of this relatively simple and inexpensive activity.

Observing Visual Cues - A Last Necessary Skill

Just as teachers need training in responding to auditory cues so they also need training in noting and interpreting the visual symptoms of stress exhibited by a child during oral reading. A child must be comfortable when reading at his instructional level. A child may show symptoms of reading difficulty by starting some new or atypical physical behavior; fingers begin to drum on a desk top, hands to rub on legs, or feet to bump against a chair leg. The teacher must observe these symptoms while recording the oral reading performance and do so in a manner that does not make the child self-conscious of his busy hands.

Films or video tapes of children reading short oral selections can train observation skills. For initial training experiences these media are superior to live children because the demonstration sequence can be rerun. Through simulation a number of children showing different behavior patterns can be studied and analyzed in a very short time. The instructor can structure each lesson so the teachers know what to look for. Class response will reveal any needs for reviewing of the film. Soon films will be viewed without introduction and the teachers will be expected to note significant behavior.

Demonstration Phase - The Final Step

The teacher is fully ready for demonstrations with live children when the listening and observation skills have been developed. The pre-service teacher especially needs an opportunity

to see how children behave when undergoing diagnostic analysis of their reading performance. Demonstration with children augments the intellectual learnings and skills in this final phase of the training sequence. Demonstrating with children bridges the gap between understanding and skill development and utilizing of these learnings in the classroom.

Assuming Full Responsibility

Finally, there remains practice under close supervision to complete this program for training teachers to use diagnostic reading techniques. Teachers must try their hand. They must practice their new learnings and skills by working with children. With the instructor close at hand, this provides the support necessary for teachers in their first attempts at analysis of reading performance. The instructor's presence offers support and he gives whatever guidance is necessary in critique sessions after the children have been dismissed. The important point is that the teacher knows help is available and that no mistake on her part will pass unnoticed and result in harm to the child. This approach develops the self-confidence necessary for teachers to assume full responsibility for the analysis of a reading performance in their own classroom. It bridges the last gap between theory and practice. The readiness for this full role can be developed through the simulation activities significantly increasing the skill growth of the teachers and shortening the practice and skill development work with children.

There are several advantages in preparing teachers to use diagnostic techniques in their own classrooms through the use of carefully designed audio tapes, coded transparencies, and films of children reading. The instructor knows in advance what auditory and visual stimuli will be presented; the element of chance that comes with using children is eliminated. The instructor is able to structure the lesson properly preparing the teachers for what they will hear and see. He knows what questions the teachers can answer after each bit of instructional media has been used. Repeated experience with the same materials enables him to anticipate questions and allows him to prepare clearer and more adequate answers. With specific teacher behavioral goals linked to each simulation material the instructor is able to judge effectiveness of learning and can repeat stimuli or present new material based upon teacher response. The whole teaching-learning environment is efficient and effective.

The use of simulation devices which require specific responses forces the teachers to be alert and active learners. Lectures and demonstrations, which require no response from the teachers, encourages them to be passive and inattentive with little risk. When teachers, or any learners, know that they must make sensible responses to an audio or video tape or film clip they are active participants in learning; learning is more rapid and effective and retention is greater (4). This procedure is valuable whenever skill in teacher response to student performance is being developed; it is

not limited to reading.

Simulation has the advantage of immediate availability with no limit to the size of the audience. Less time is spent in arranging for children to be transported to a specific place at a specific time. Children on tape and film never get frightened or sick at the last minute. Their voices are audible. Naive children are available for the final phase of this training program instead of test-wise guinea pigs.

Finally, the training environment is nearly identical to the regular classroom so that transfer of these newly achieved understandings and skills is nearly automatic. The classroom teacher is ready to systematically analyze the reading achievement and specific instructional needs of each child at the completion of this training. The basis for diagnostic teaching has been developed. The teacher will appraise each child's reading achievement and modify instruction according to specific individual instructional needs with a new sense of confidence. This approach to teacher training requires a new approach for the college instructor. The rejection of the lecture approach to teacher training is only the beginning, but the evidence is in. The need cannot be denied. The children will be the winners.

Footnotes

1. Marjorie Seddon Johnson & Roy Kress, Informal Reading Inventories (Newark: International Reading Association, 1965), p. 5.
2. A code adequate for training classroom teachers to use diagnostic procedures is as follows: Omissions -- circle the word omitted ((the)); Substitutions -- draw a line through the word substituted and write in the substitution (was/were); Insertions -- insert with a caret (see the new/∧ wagon); Pronunciations -- write a "P" above all words pronounced for the child (P/bicycle).
3. Robert A. McCracken, "The Informal Reading Inventory as a Means of Improving Instruction," The Evaluation of Children's Reading Achievement, Perspectives in Reading #8 (Newark: International Reading Association, 1967), p. 86.
4. Donald Michael, "Some Factors Influencing the Effects of Audience Participation on Learning from a Factual Film," HRRL Memo Report No. 13, Revised Report (Washington, D.C., U. S. Air Force Human Resources Research Laboratories, Headquarters Command, Bolling Air Force Base, December 1951).

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